

Illuminating Musical Lifeworlds:
Phenomenological narratives of the musical lifeworlds of
five senior secondary school students

By

(Malcolm)

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Abstract

This study investigates the musical lifeworlds of five musically dedicated senior secondary high school students in order to explicate meaning structures within their 'musical ways of being'. These structures illuminate the participants' musical lives as they are 'lived' and each idiosyncratic and unique relationship with music.

While the study illuminates broad features of the way 'musical lives are lived' it also highlights two specific lifeworld realms. The first is the realm of lived musical experiences that are described as deeply felt, formative, transformative or epiphanic. Interpretation of these experiences provides insight into the ways that the participants had commenced musical lives. The second is the realm of lived experience with different types of music learning processes. Illuminating music teaching and learning processes from the perspective of each student is designed to contribute to the ongoing dialogue and discussion of music's place in formal institutional settings and informal, student initiated communities of practice.

Data were generated from interviews with the participants, their parents and music teachers, and also from observations of musical performances, researcher field notes and reflexive journal entries. A 're-storying' process was then conducted using narrative analyses and syntheses and phenomenological interpretation. The re-storied research texts were then structured and presented as composite 'portraits' of each participant.

The project promotes narrative and phenomenological 'ways of thinking' about music, music experience and processes of inquiry. I have explored a pragmatic, embodied and situated experience of narrative and phenomenological 'ways of thinking' rather than operating from *a priori* principles and abstract theories *about* them. This pragmatic engagement is made visible by the insertion of vignettes, at strategic points, of my situated, lived experiences and learning processes with *being* a narrative and phenomenological thinker.

The findings suggest that by illuminating the essential meanings within individual musical lifeworlds, music may be perceived not as a *thing*, but an active process and a socially mediated, integrated structure of self. Sensitivity to and empathy with the ways students live musical lives may assist educators to achieve

situational appropriateness whilst teaching. Understanding the ways that life and music are inseparable will help to counter the alienating tendency in Western music education to view music as an autonomous aesthetic object that is independent of the experiencer. The findings suggest that music educators engage in 'pedagogical self-transformation' by adopting a narrative and phenomenological stance. This transformation, I argue, promotes empathy where educators are primarily engaged as 'enhancers of musical identity' and 'interpreters of the musical texts of life'.

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I am indebted to the musicians who took part in the project. Despite having incredibly busy schedules, they gave up valuable time to tell their 'stories of musical lives'. Their commitment to this research has been a reflection of their dedication and love for music.

Finally, I would like to express my deep gratitude and love for my wife Eilish, who has endured my time as a full-time researcher with such patience and constant support.

In memory of
Sidney 'Vic' Cleaver
1913 – 2000

*From childhood I listened
To the stories you told of your life.
But now, taking less for granted
I feel connected to your experiences
And the wonderful adventure
That formed a remarkable life*

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